

United States Senator Orrin G. Hatch  
Remarks on the Casey/Reid Amendment  
United States Senate

September 22, 2011

Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the Casey/Reid amendment. Over the past several days we have had the opportunity to publicly discuss and debate a number of serious flaws with the Trade Adjustment Assistance program and its proposed expansion. Perhaps the most egregious aspect is voting to spend more taxpayer dollars on an expanded domestic spending program of dubious value at the very same time our colleagues on the Super Committee are scrutinizing every penny of federal spending in a bipartisan effort to get our federal deficit under control.

It makes me wonder whether this body understands the gravity of the deficit we are facing. As a country we are simply spending more money than we have. If it continues, we are going to bankrupt our country and leave behind a grim future for our children and grandchildren.

Now, you will hear many of my colleagues talk about how important it is to spend this money, and I am sure a lot of them will feel good about their vote. But we all know that the good feeling that comes from buying things we can't afford is fleeting while the debt accrued hangs like a dark cloud over our daily lives. We simply cannot afford to continue to spend money our country does not have. This is why I will be voting no.

Despite my concerns, I am convinced that this amendment and bill will pass. This spring, the President made it clear that if this domestic spending program is not expanded and approved, he would abandon our allies in Colombia, Panama and South Korea and cede these growing markets to our foreign competitors.

While the President may have been willing to accept that outcome, many of my colleagues were not; they stepped up to the plate and vowed to support the President's demands for more spending. As a result, the deck in favor of this bill was stacked long ago.

Still, I am glad that we have had an open debate on the merits of the program. Earlier this year the President attempted to shield TAA from strict scrutiny and debate by jamming it into the South Korea implementing bill. Doing so would have been a clear abuse of U.S. trade laws, and would have denied the Senate an opportunity to fairly debate and amend TAA. The American people deserved better than this, and Finance Committee Republicans fought hard to ensure that this did not happen. It's largely a result of our efforts that we are here today.

Even though the deck was stacked against our amendments long ago, this discussion has been a useful exercise. It has been over nine years since the Senate engaged in a real trade debate on the Senate floor.

Senators deserve an opportunity to have their voices heard on issues related to international trade. By engaging in debate, we are honoring our republican constitutional traditions. We are doing what the American people expect us to do — openly discussing problems and, in doing so, helping to resolve them.

During this debate, a number of amendments were offered that enabled Senators to go on record regarding their trade priorities and core beliefs. For the first time in years, we were able to draw clear distinctions between rhetoric and action. Of course, there has been debate about the merits of the free trade agreements themselves. As I noted earlier, the President and many of my colleagues who purport to support these agreements, made it clear that in reality they only support the FTAs in exchange for something else. That something else turned out to be a demand for more spending. I am worried that going forward, this pattern will continue. I certainly hope not. As a nation we cannot afford to hold our international economic competitiveness hostage to unrelated demands for more spending or to a liberal social agenda.

During the course of this debate I expressed my concerns that the real cost of the TAA expansion bill is unknown. Recall that benefits under TAA are paid out on top of unemployment insurance. As more and more people take advantage of the program and as the number of weeks of regular UI contract, the cost of this entitlement program could spiral out of control. So, a number of amendments were offered that would help constrain its future growth so that we do not end up sticking the American taxpayer with another out of control spending program.

Every single one of these amendments were rejected by my colleagues across the aisle. Their passion for spending runs so deep that even an amendment by my friend and colleague Senator Kyl -- which implemented one of President Obama's recommendations to cut TAA funding for firms -- was rejected. At a time when the Super Committee is struggling to cut spending in areas such as defense and health care, I find it astonishing that my colleagues cannot support eliminating a program that even President Obama agrees should be cut.

My colleagues across the aisle also chose to reject an amendment to provide their own President with the authority to negotiate new trade agreements. We all know that the authority to negotiate trade agreements expired years ago. Since then, the United States has been sitting on the sidelines while other countries negotiate agreements all around the world. Everyone knows that if you are not in the game, you cannot win. Right now, the United States is not in the game. While it is true that the President is in the process of negotiating an agreement to create a Trans-Pacific Partnership, we all know that the chances of it actually succeeding are almost non-existent without TPA. While the pro-trade rhetoric sounds good from the other side, when it comes down to concrete action, President Obama and his Democratic colleagues are absent once again.

I am perhaps most disturbed by their rejection of my amendment which would have made the expansion of this domestic spending program contingent upon submission, approval and signature of our pending free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama and South Korea. This amendment simply held President Obama accountable. The President said that there will be no FTAs unless Congress passed TAA. The insinuation is that if Congress does pass TAA, the President will submit, support, and sign all three FTAs.

Yet, even today we do not know if that is the case. My understanding is that the White House has given no indication that they will actually submit these agreements for a vote. My amendment simply called for Presidential accountability. But even Presidential accountability was rejected by the other side. Once again, the pro-trade rhetoric of the past several months is shown to be nothing but a façade.

I will be voting against the amendment to expand TAA and, if it is approved, I will be voting against final passage of the bill. I simply cannot condone more spending on a program of dubious value at a time when our nation is broke. I remain hopeful that President Obama will submit our pending free trade agreements to Congress. If he does, and they are approved, I am confident that President Obama and his team will drape themselves in the pro-trade flag and claim responsibility for moving these agreements forward. But the fact of the matter is that the authority to negotiate these agreements and the actual negotiation of these agreements themselves is due to the hard work and late nights of President Bush and his team. This is one instance where President Obama can rightly place responsibility at the feet of his predecessor.

My Republican colleagues and I put forward a number of amendments during the week to constrain government spending, open foreign markets for our products, and hold the President accountable to his rhetoric. Unfortunately, every single one was defeated, mostly along party lines. But we will not be deterred. We will continue to fight against out of control government spending. We will continue to fight for Presidential authority to open foreign markets to U.S. exports. We will continue to fight for transparency and accountability in our international trade policy. And, while we may not win the battle today, I am confident that we will win in the end.

Over the next year I plan to conduct rigorous oversight over President Obama's trade policy. If these agreements are eventually submitted and approved, I will work hard to make sure they enter into force quickly. I also plan to conduct extensive and continued oversight over the operation of the Trade Adjustment Assistance program. I am convinced that it is a flawed program and that strong Congressional oversight will help expose those flaws. I will also work hard to make sure that our next President, whoever that may be, has the authority to negotiate strong trade agreements that tear down barriers to American exports. Over the past several days, many of my colleagues expressed interest in updating this authority. I welcome that interest and want to express my

sincere desire to work with them immediately to see that TPA authority is renewed. Our nation, and our workers, cannot afford to wait.